

To: Smith, Bonnie[smith.bonnie@epa.gov]
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Dan Heyman, Public News Service-WV

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(02/25/14) CHARLESTON, W.Va. - Three quarters of West Virginians said the state has not done enough to protect air and water, according to a [poll](#) taken after the Freedom chemical spill. The poll was commissioned by the Sierra Club and conducted by nonpartisan Hart Research Associates.

Jay Campbell, senior vice president, Hart Research Associates, said they found the demand for stronger environmental protections running deep and wide across the state after the Elk River was contaminated.

"The spill was a signal that things really have to change. This agreement crossed all income levels, all education levels, all age levels. And what this really underscores is this was a pretty big shock to the system," Campbell said.

Nearly two-thirds of West Virginians said they would support political candidates who favor tougher air and water regulations and enforcement. The pollster said that opinion was surprisingly strong, even among conservatives.

"Majorities across the political spectrum," Campbell noted. "It's not just some 'lefty' sentiment here. This spill really was a wake-up call, and something of a gut punch for the state."

The poll found political independents favored pro-regulation candidates by more than two to one, and Republicans were evenly divided. Campbell said that was really striking.

"In polling, you don't often get Republicans explicitly favoring greater regulation," he said, "especially Republicans in West Virginia, who are not anyone's idea of shrinking-violet, tree-hugging liberals."

A separate report just released by environmental consultant Downstream Strategies found more than 60 potential sources of contamination to West Virginia American Water's Elk River intake. Campbell said West Virginians are strongly aware of and paying attention to the issue of tap-water contamination, even if they live outside of the area.

"We found that nine out of 10 people said that they are either pretty concerned or very concerned," he said. "And concern was even high in areas of the state that weren't directly affected."

For years, state industries and their political allies have argued that clean air and water rules amounted to an excessive burden imposed by outsiders. Campbell said the poll shows a strong majority want tougher action by the EPA and state regulators.

The full Hart Research Associates report is available at <http://action.sierraclub.org>.

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